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DR. FREE'S PROPOSALS

FOR OPENING

Two DIVINITY SCHOOLS

IN THE
Neighbourhood of L O N D O N,

For the Instruction and Entertainment of People of all *Denominations*, who desire to see a farther Reformation of public Errors, and Abuses in Matters of Religion.

THE Rev. Dr. FREE, Lecturer of *Newington-Butts*, who for the Space of *four and thirty Years* has waited in vain for *Church-Preferment*, proposes, for the better Support of himself and Family, and for the more free and laudable Exercise of his Profession, to open two *Divinity-Schools*; one for the Use of the NOBILITY and GENTRY near St. *James's*; the other in the Village of *Walworth*, in the Parish of *Newington Butts*, the Place of his Residence; and therein to establish a Course of Lectures tending to restore the Catholick or Universal Principles of *Moral Philosophy* and *Natural Religion*, and to confute the reigning Errors of *Technical* or *Artificial* Systems, supported *Politically*, either by open Force, or secret Combination, to serve the Purposes of designing Men.

- I. To make these *Lectures* of general Use, they will be read in different Languages three Times a Week, in the Manner following: On *Monday* in *Pall-Mall*, in *Latin*, and explained in *English*: On *Friday* at ditto, in *French*, and explained in *English*: On *Sunday* at *Walworth*, all in *English*.
- II. These *Lectures* will be open to People of all *Denominations*, who are willing to become Subscribers.
- III. The Price to *Subscribers* will be a *Guinea* the Year, to be paid for the first Year at the Time of subscribing, and afterwards at Commencement of every Year succeeding.

Some

Some Thoughts upon the Use, and Expediency of erecting Divinity-Schools in and about London, and the excellent Purposes, which they may be made to serve, if properly supported by the Concurrence of Men of Quality and Condition, who enjoying the Advantages of a liberal Education, are generally superior to that contracted Way of Thinking, which fixes the Prejudices of the common People.

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— *Procul, o procul, este profani.*

Whoever has read Bishop *Lavington's* Book of the Enthusiasm of the *Methodists* and *Papists* compared, must be convinced that *Enthusiasm* is one of the great Limbs of the *Popish* Religion, which upon the failure of the little Branches, will of itself always afford Matter for its Revival and Propagation, though perhaps not directly under the same Appearance; and therefore he must consider the many Shops of Enthusiasm, which we meet with in the Capital Towns, and in this great Metropolis, under the Name of *Tabernacles*, *Chapels*, &c. as so many dangerous Enemies to the *Protestant* Religion. If by *Protestant* Religion be meant, (and I know no other Meaning) “A Religion demanding the Right of Protesting against every factitious Article of Faith, or public Doctrine, which shall be found to be contrary to Reason and common Sense.” This is the true, and indeed the only Notion of a *Protestant* Religion. For if in any Country calling itself *Protestant*, this Right of Protesting shall be denied, or exercised with Fear or Danger to a Man's Person or Property, that pretended *Protestantism* and *Popery*, notwithstanding the Variation of the Names are essentially so much alike, so equally fostering Error and Persecution, that they must appear to every Man of Sense to be only Impositions of the same Species: since the People in both Cases are equally enslaved by arbitrary Power, communicating Authority to a set of Public Deceivers, and bigotted to Enthusiastick and Chimerical Opinions, which the very Authors of them, bold and insolent as they are in propagating Delusion, are not able to maintain.

To counterwork the Schemes of these several Manufacturers, I could wish that a *Divinity-School* was opened in this unstable Age of Ignorance, as in my Opinion it would contribute a great deal to the Diminishing the Variety of vulgar Errors in Religion now so prevalent, and establishing something of the Truth. In this View, as we are always disclaiming, and yet frequently practising Persecution, I think it would be but Reasonable to grant our rational Divines, whose Hands at present are inconsistently with the Principles of the Protestant Religion, too much tied up to Forms, the same degree of Liberty and Toleration that we allow *Enthusiasts*. And in that Case, I imagine it would be very useful, as the Times so much require it, if the Members of this School were to treat a little upon *natural* Religion, which, though the Basis of all Religion, seems at present to be driven out of the Christian World. I would have them endeavour to recall this natural Religion, to shew the Evidence, upon which it is founded, its Pre-eminence, Universality, Sufficiency, Immutability, and endless Duration.

I would then have them treat of the *Patriarchal* Religion, or the Religion of the first Patriarchs, as founded upon the Religion of Nature; it would be easy to shew, by the several Temples scattered in all Parts of the Globe, that this was the only Religion which was ever universally established, and established too by common Consent; that its Usages and Rules have never been abolished by any subsequent Religion, and consequently remain in Force at the present Time.

From these two *Universal* Religions; that of *Nature*, every where acknowledged as the Prime Law of God, (though nowhere in these Parts established by human Authority) and that of the *Patriarchs*, once universally established by human Consent; it would be proper, according to the Order of Time, to descend to *local* or particular Religions; that is, Religions limited to particular Times and Places, such as the *Jewish*, *Mahometan*, &c. to enquire into their several Merits, and the Methods by which they have been established, or subsist, which would lead to the Consideration of their mutability, as not depending like Natural Religion upon indelible Characters coeval with the World, but upon *Traditions*, which must vary; and *Records*, which must be subject to Loss and Decay.

This Account of the *local* and *particular* Religions might be closed by a Miscellaneous Display of all the different, nay
opposite

Opposite Tenets or Doctrines, upon the same Subjects, published and maintained by the several Religious Sects and Parties throughout the known World : In Order to shew the infinite Variety of Opposition, Disturbance, and Confusion, which Religion, when it departs from right Reason and the Laws of Nature, is able to produce.

The Matters here mentioned may be discussed in different Manners ; for Instance, by way of Thesis, by Dialogue, sometimes in the Form of a Controversy, or else by scholastic Disputation, or Demonstration, as the several Subjects will best admit : very often I should chuse to introduce them in the Words and Form already given them by our *English* Writers, who have been employed on these Subjects ; and I, moreover, am of Opinion, that any Gentleman qualified, who would first communicate his *Thesis*, or *Propositions*, together with the Manner of Defending his Principles, for Approbation, (upon Condition that he did not depart from the Method projected and approved) should be permitted to Read, or Dispute, in his own Person. In every Disputation, the Professor (for such an Officer would be indispensably necessary) should take the Chair as *Moderator* : Such of the Members of the Society, as agreed to become so, being either *Opponents* or *Respondents* in their Turns. The Days of Exercise should be appointed according to the Convenience of the Society, but stated and fixed, that the Audience might never be disappointed by Variations.

An Edifice for this Purpose would not be very Expensive ; according to the Plan which has been drawn, which is of a *Gothic* Form, and very plain and simple, I should imagine, it might be erected for six or seven Hundred Pounds at farthest : And as much larger Sums are in these Days, of Ostentation chearfully raised to serve less noble Purposes, it is to be hoped that several of the Nobility, Gentry, and Clergy of the established Church, as well as those of other Denominations, would be inclined to encourage an Institution purposely set on Foot to vindicate the Honour of God, his Nature, and Attributes, so openly and audaciously blasphemed by the Ignorance and Enthusiasm of the present Age.

JOHN FREE.

